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A DESCRIPTION OF THE PLOT STRUCTURE IN IRIS MURDOCH'S NOVEL THE BLACK PRINCE

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Abstract: As a result of studying Murdoch's creative work, this article explores the content of her theory based on the "integration of metaphysical and existential elements." On the metaphysical level, we encounter the moral question, "Who should I be?" Along this path, the existential mode of consciousness introduces firm concepts such as "I am free," "I choose," and "I am responsible." Without separating these two dimensions, the writer perceives their unity through art.

Keywords: creativity, concept, interpretation, art, editor, creative struggle

The novel is particularly significant for its complex, multi-layered structure, which includes introductions and conclusions by various characters, among whom the voice of the anonymous "editor," Loxias, stands out. This narrative device encourages the reader to approach Bradley's account with skepticism rather than complete trust, while simultaneously inviting reflection on the relationship between the writer and the reader. Bradley's creative struggle in the novel represents the tension between artistic aspiration and moral dilemmas. His puritanical (morally rigid) views clash with his creative passions, leading him on a quest for authenticity and genuine human connection. The depiction of love in the novel reveals it to be not only magical and inspiring, but also a potentially destructive force.

While reading *The Black Prince*, the reader also encounters a range of philosophical reflections. The novel raises profound philosophical questions, particularly portraying love both as a journey toward self-forgetfulness and as a source of personal suffering. Murdoch prompts the reader to consider how personal desires and social expectations shape human relationships.

In examining Murdoch's metaphysical theory of art, we see that she approaches ethical problems not primarily from the perspective of "action-ethics," but rather in terms of "being-ethics." In this context, the central concept—drawing once again on Plato's philosophy—is expressed as the "Good." Murdoch's philosophical views, particularly her ideas concerning the relationship between art and morality, the movement of the human soul toward goodness, and the metaphysical nature of creativity, find their most profound artistic expression in the novel *The Black Prince*.

In Murdoch's philosophical and aesthetic thought, art is understood as a metaphysical means that leads human beings toward the Good. While she presents art as a source of aesthetic pleasure, she also portrays it as a force that enables the full realization of moral perception. This view is embodied in the character of Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*, where his spiritual experiences and the conflicts between love and creativity are explored in detail. Through this figure, Murdoch interprets at a metaphysical level the struggle between the creator's desire to produce inner beauty and the demands of moral responsibility.

Furthermore, according to Murdoch, the highest form of art consists in loving reality while forgetting the self—when the artist moves beyond the subjective "I" and directs attention toward the objective beauty of truth. For this reason, in *The Black Prince* the concept of art is presented as a spiritual process that liberates the individual from the self and unites them with goodness and truth. In studying Murdoch's metaphysical theory of art, it is not difficult to recognize the integration of Plato's concept of the "Idea of the Good" with modern literary philosophy. The creative process depicted in *The Black Prince* represents a metaphysical

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transformation in which the individual abandons selfish desires and subjective perspectives, coming to perceive goodness through beauty.

Consequently, the main reason Murdoch rises above the individualistic and relativistic tendencies of existentialism lies in her presentation of art as a moral experience. These ideas are reflected in her philosophical writings and, in a distinctly artistic form, in *The Black Prince*, which vividly expresses Murdoch's understanding of art as a means of metaphysical, moral, and spiritual transformation. The concept of "vision," or "seeing," occupies a central place in Murdoch's theory, particularly in her critique of prevailing paradigms. She challenges approaches such as behaviorism, existentialism, and utilitarianism, which emphasize utility, self-interest, human action, will, and choice, arguing instead for a deeper moral vision oriented toward the Good.¹

At this point, we will quote one of Murdoch's meaningful words: "*My thesis is that ethically we must attempt to rid ourselves of the self; and that art and nature — beauty — are means of this self-transcendence*"². Since the quoted wise saying of Iris Murdoch possesses deep metaphysical and moral layers, we will present its analysis step by step, in detail. Firstly, in the cited text, the ideas of "self" (i.e., the ego) and "self-transcendence" (going beyond or letting go of the self) are expressed on ontological and axiological grounds. From a metaphysical perspective, the sentence can be understood to suggest that human existence is always a consciousness centered on the "I," and that this "I" measures the world through its desires, wishes, and interests. According to Murdoch, this ego separates a person from truth. The ego acts as a metaphysical veil, preventing us from perceiving all things in our consciousness as they truly are. Therefore, the process of "liberation from the self" is ontological purification, freeing a person from metaphysical egocentrism.

The following phrase, "Attention to the Good," refers to directing attention toward goodness. Influenced by Simone Weil, Murdoch places the concept of attention at the moral-metaphysical center. According to her, "Attention" is a spiritual focus that looks beyond the "I." When a person transcends the self, the process of perceiving Goodness, Beauty, and Truth outside themselves resembles a mystical experience: with the disappearance of the subjective center, the light of objective goodness emerges. From a metaphysical standpoint, this connects to Platonic thought. Goodness is the highest form of being and the source of all existence. When a person moves beyond their "I," they come closer to this source.

According to Murdoch, the expression of art, nature, and beauty as mediums shows that the beauty in art and nature can draw a person away from their personal interests and egoistic beliefs. A person who becomes captivated by beauty quickly forgets the "I" and perceives themselves only within the totality of all beauty. In that moment, a metaphysical unity arises: the boundary between subject and object disappears. This state of "self-transcendence"—going beyond the self—manifests as a form of moral purification.

Murdoch's metaphysical perspective can be summarized as follows: morality represents an ontological orientation. Beauty, art, and nature act as metaphysical tools that transform this orientation, guiding us beyond the self toward a deeper layer of existence harmonized with goodness. Murdoch does not define art merely from an aesthetic perspective; he also elaborates on it ethically. According to him, art depicts a state in which a person is freed from the self and the ego, directing their attention entirely toward the object. This process can be interpreted metaphysically, as a factor expressing the concept of "goodness." The creator defines art not merely as a born idea or expression, but as "an effort to suspend the ego and strive to see the truth." We can understand this definition as the manifestation of metaphysical perception in the form of art.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism> [Murojaat sanasi: 05.11.2025]

² https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/murdoch/?utm_source [Murojaat sanasi: 05.11.2025]

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The author presents the protagonist of *The Black Prince*, Bradley Pearson, as a person who entered the realm of creativity at an early age and was constantly engaged in spiritual and intellectual exploration. Initially, the novel recounts stories shaped by human experiences, and later, in another section, it presents the perspectives of other characters regarding truth, art, and the writer himself.³ This situation aligns perfectly with Murdoch's theory, as art moves beyond an ego-centered scenario and is seen as a means for both the writer and the reader to approach "truth." Due to Bradley's passion for creativity, he comes closer to "salvation." Throughout the course of the novel, he reveals to the reader his inner torment through his feelings of suffering, the spiritual and intellectual struggles during the writing process, and the responsibilities of authorship, all of which reflect his internal anguish. At this point, we quote Bradley's line: "through a divine inspiration he has attained a kind of Platonic tranquillity in the presence of truth and self-knowledge." Through this statement, the character presents art and writing not as a profession, but as a tool for spiritual exploration.

In Murdoch's theory, the human condition is always foregrounded, and through acknowledging art, the human spirit develops. Art is not the denial of limitation, but rather the act of confronting it and liberating oneself from it. For Murdoch, this process is metaphysical—it moves a person from the ordinary state of subjectivity into a state open to the object. From this metaphysical perspective, we can examine the connection between art and morality. Murdoch never viewed art and morality as separate. He primarily describes art as a means of moral understanding, and morality as a condition that can be realized in the form of art, providing numerous examples of how art opens the path to "goodness."

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³ https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/murdoch/?utm_source [Murojaat sanasi: 05.11.2025]